

THE
DRAMATIC ART OF SHAKESPEARE,

WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE

TO

“*A Midsummer Night's Dream* :”

BEING

AN INAUGURAL LECTURE,

DELIVERED AT THE

MC GILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL,

BY

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"O mighty Poet! Thy works are not, as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art, but are also like the phenomena of nature,—like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers, like frost and snow, hail and dew, hailstorm and thunder,—which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert; but that the further we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident."—DR. QUINCY.

Entered according to Act of Parliament, by
CHARLES E. MOYSE, in the year one thou-
sand eight hundred and seventy-nine, in
the office of the Minister of Agriculture,
at Ottawa.]

THE DRAMATIC ART OF SHAKESPEARE.

THE keenest French critic of our literature, M. Taine, declares that its colouring is almost always sober, and at times even gloomy. The English, he says, have an irresistible tendency to sermonize, and where he expected to find an utter abandonment to momentary pleasure, or at least a dash of thoughtless levity, he discerns the pulse of playful seriousness throbbing. Although quaint shrewd humour pervades much of the best English thought, humour which M. Taine does not fully appreciate, still in his brilliant sketch the author divines the essence of the books he criticises. It is the characteristic of good English writing to be true. By "true" I mean that there underlies the outward form a spirit of earnestness which the writer intends to awaken in those who read thoughtfully. The desire to find out the right and to do it, the wrong and to undo it, is strongly implanted in the sterling English mind; so strongly that what by others was intended to be shallow and ephemeral is often made in English mouths the means of teaching the highest truths. Nowhere is this spirit of earnestness more clearly expressed than in Shakespeare's plays through the medium of Dramatic Art.

By way of preface to the subject of which my lecture to-day mainly treats I intend very briefly to exemplify that high sense of duty which we may claim as peculiarly our own. In so doing I shall have gained my point if I help to convince you that precious metal, which will soon make rich the honest worker, lies hid beneath the wide field of English literature.

We have the germ of earnestness of purpose in the oldest song. The gleeman boldly avowed that he lived by skill of hand and brightness of wit. The warriors about whom he sang vaunted that they fought for pay and not for glory. "Send, dear Hrothgar, to Hygelac the gold thou hast given me, that the Goth's lord may know I have found a good bestower of rings," said Beowulf, the hero of our first great English epic, ere he dived into the mere to combat the monsters who had desolated Hrothgar's hearth and home. This was the spirit, mercenary but candid, of our Pagan literature, both Keltic and Saxon; a spirit enshrined in the inmost feelings of men, and hesitating not for a moment to proclaim exactly what those feelings were. "I will make your hall ring with your praises" is the refrain of the old bard, "but you must promise me as my reward the spoils of the bright spear." As time rolled on the earnestness became deeper and nobler, its aspirations higher. I will adduce three striking examples to prove my statement: the first two relating to romance, the third to history—all three showing that the inner meaning of Shakespeare's plays does not stand alone, but that it finds a fainter foreshadow nearly three centuries ere our great dramatist was born.

About the middle of the fourteenth century an English book was written, *The Court of Love*. Who the author was we know not for certain. He may have been Chaucer despite the verdict given by one of the most accomplished scholars of our day, Mr. Furnivall. When speaking of *The Court of Love* together with other poems generally ascribed to Chaucer, Mr. Furnivall says, "they must be considered as spurious till some one can establish their genuineness, which I make bold to doubt whether any one ever can or will do." Still the writer of the book wedded the English sense of duty to the frivolity of the Troubadour, who poured forth a flood of song about those fashionable but innocent assemblies in the south of France where love verses were set to music, love causes tried in accordance with formal codes, and judgments delivered in conformity with precedent. The Englishman's king and queen of love are not ordinary monarchs to whom the discussions of the court

serve for mere amusement. They are Admetus and Alcestis—Alcestis who died for Admetus' sake, the great classical exemplar of deep devotion and faithfulness, that Alcestis to whom Milton, in after time, likened his own "late espoused saint." The walls of the Englishman's palace wherein the Court is held are adorned with the symbol of constancy. They are

"Depeinted wonderly
With many a thousand daisies rede as rose,
And white also."

Let me add that the daisy speaks eloquently for Chaucer. In the prologue to his poem, *The Legend of Good Women*—you cannot fail to notice how significant the place is—Chaucer tells how no May morning dawns without seeing him walking in the mead to behold the daisy open at sunrise; how in the evening he runs to watch its petals close; tells how he would that he had English rime or prose capable of praising this flower aright; how he dreamed that he lay in the meadow gazing on the daisy when the god and queen of love came from afar, and how she bore on her head a fret of gold and on it a white crown,

"For all the world right as a daisie
Y-crowned is."

The English poet took the little modest flower and by its heart of gold and white corona of purity he typified virtues which the foreigner esteemed lightly.

I pass to the second example: The tales of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, that never-failing storehouse for posterity, were told simply to amuse. They were to make the gay listeners quite callous to the plague raging at their very doors. Those seven fashionable ladies and three gentlemen talking in a garden near Florence could scarcely have foreseen how winged their thoughts were to be. A healthy English mind was to moralize their stories in the mouths of a band of English pilgrims, representing all classes of English society, both gentle and simple, as they trotted along the highway of life in honest hearty fellowship, with intent to worship at the shrine of the one modern English

saint. What Chaucer takes from the Decameron he purifies directly, or, as in the case of the Clerk's Tale of the patient Griselda, which Petrarch had previously moralized, uses a purified version as his staple.

Let me cite yet another example : To Geoffrey of Monmouth belongs the honour of having given to King Arthur a definite place in English history. Geoffrey's play of fancy or humour, however, overstepped the bounds of fact. William of Newbury-writing only forty years after the publication of the "*Historia Britonum*," says of its writer that he "cloaked with the honest name of History" fables about Arthur ; that he lied "saucily" and "shamelessly ;" that he made "the little finger of his Arthur stouter than the back of Alexander the Great." Geoffrey's fun and levity provoked those of his time to speak out boldly, but his historical falsehoods were soon to be clothed in spiritual dress. The old tales of rapine and passion—that is simply what they were—had a new life given to them at the hand of Walter Map, born on the Marches of Wales about the middle of the twelfth century. It was he who gave Lancelot, the unspiritual Knight, a son, Sir Galahad, clad in a flame-coloured dress which typified purity itself ; and it was he who showed how England's purity was lost when the Holy Grail disappeared to be found only by the unstained Sir Galahad. The echo of Map's song has been caught by one of the sweetest singers of to-day, and Map's high purpose rings out clearer than ever in the grandest of Tennysonian song.

The aim of this introduction has been to show that good English writing is not superficial, but that at its best it possesses something peculiar to it, an inner purpose which has been called the spirit of earnestness. Shakespeare is emphatically the earnest man of our literature. Do not misunderstand me. I do not wish to imply that a seeker of religious fanaticism, generally the result of narrow or warped or unhealthy views, should go to Shakespeare to feed his mind. What I maintain is that any one who loves to think of humanity as man, and God as the good, will find much that is of surpassing excellence in Shakespeare's dramas.

The dramatist is a poet in the highest sense of the word. He is the truest "maker"—the exact Saxon word-equivalent of the Greek *ποιητής*,—for he not only portrays the deepest feelings of one human heart in his creation of the individual, but he also sets forth the action and reaction of mind upon mind when his characters meet in the world of the stage. There are certain rules of dramatic art which the old playwright was supposed to obey. These rules are known by the name of The Three Unities, the Unity of Time, the Unity of Place, and the Unity of Action. The Unities, as influencing us, are derived from the classical dramatists. Two of them are laid down as canons of dramatic art by Aristotle, who makes no direct reference to the Unity of Place. The ancients, generally, observed these rules, and those literatures on which the influence of Latin and of Greek has been strong have regarded the Unities with far greater care than the English. The Unity of Time declares that the play should confine its events to such as would naturally occur within a single revolution of the sun ; and the Unity of Place states that all events should transpire in one spot. The Unity of Action, however, does not insist on one action only ; there may be two or three in the same play, but they must be subsidiary to the main plot ; were they not so, the drama would no longer be one, but two or more distinct writings without any strong link. In other words the Unity of Action proclaims that all minor incidents should lead up to, and be swallowed in, one great event, the *dénouement*. Sir Philip Sidney, in *An Apologie for Poetry*, laments that the English tragedies and comedies he has seen observe rules "neither of honest civility, nor of skilful poetrie, excepting Gorboduck," the first English tragedy, which climbs "to the height of Seneca his style," yet "is faulty both in place, and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions."

Of the three Unities Shakespeare invariably keeps the only true one, the Unity of Action, in the highest regard. He does so because it is the natural consequence of a fourth Unity which is found in all its power in him and is wanting in a host of dramatists whose plays are read only by the curious or the student.

This Unity which makes Shakespeare what he is let us call the Unity of Character. The Unity of Character leads us to the hidden source from which the actions spring, to the mental workings of the actors themselves. Yet Shakespeare was not a subjective dramatist—quite the reverse. He did not evolve from his inner consciousness or mould from book-knowledge the creations which have amazed and charmed three centuries of men. If he needed a king he did not fetch a patch of royalty from this corner and a patch from that and piece them together with some oddity from his own brain, producing only an awkward automaton at the best. He seems to have gone out into the world to sound the soul of humanity to its depths. Anatomize his kings: the finest nerve-fibril is royal, and when you have laid bare the very core itself, the life spot of majesty, you will find it is the quintessence of that which pervades the whole. Shakespeare needs a king, and lo! a king speaks, speaks naturally, speaks *outwards*. Other kings, for the most part, are kings to the eye, but their words and acts become them not; their speech is only an unnatural laboured effort to point inwards to the soul which should animate them, but does not exist; in short, they are effigies, are not true. When, nearly fifty years after Shakespeare's death, the great French dramatists were asserting their power, and Corneille was writing his famous essay on the Three Unities, the dramatic criticism of Europe bitterly accused the English of neglecting these golden rules of art. In that dark hour of the English drama, Dryden was so far subservient to French influence, though he professed to repudiate it, as to argue on behalf of rhyme only in plays against Sir Robert Howard, who took the side of blank verse, a memorable and prolonged controversy, and one very interesting to the student; so far subservient, too, as to copy the intrigue—and meaningless plots with which the French and the Spanish literature of his time abounded. But the foreign attack against our writers was weak. Shakespeare and his contemporaries felt that all the world was a stage, and that in making the stage the world they must portray the incidents of human life as they naturally happen, and not as a spasm of twenty-four hours

duration confined to one place. A weaker and unsympathetic argument against the French, but an argument sufficiently powerful, is that this rejuvenation of Aristotle did not take place in Shakespeare's day. Still, Shakespeare, knowing the rules of which I have spoken, has left us a specimen of what his master-hand could do in the *Tempest*. There the scene is laid in front of Prospero's cell, and the action is confined to three hours, but we are conscious, in spite of the finest poetry, that events are speeding far too fast, and that Ferdinand's admiration leaps to its zenith.

The Unity of Action, then, Shakespeare scrupulously adheres to. The most distinctive mark of his genius has been said to be the perfect harmony in which his bye-plots, down to their most trivial details, stand in relation to the *central idea*; yet it was long before this harmony was recognized. How inexplicable the grandest of his dramas was to the best wit of the world for whom he wrote, can be learned from Voltaire's criticism of *Hamlet*. The brilliant Frenchman could not have penetrated beneath the surface, for he says: "Hamlet is mad in the second act, and his mistress is so in the third; the prince, feigning to kill a rat, kills the father of his mistress, and the heroine throws herself into the river. They bury her on the stage; the grave-diggers utter quodlibets worthy of them, holding skulls in their hands; Prince Hamlet replies to their disgusting follies with coarseness not less disgusting. During this time one of the actors makes the conquest of Poland. Hamlet, his mother, and his stepfather drink together on the stage; they sing at table, they quarrel, they strike, and they kill." To Voltaire the play seemed a perfect jumble of inconsistencies. The first English commentators saw very dimly what Shakespeare meant. Some thought Hamlet's madness was real, others that it was feigned, others again could not understand why even feigned madness was necessary. But when we take Hamlet to be the type of the man of powerful and cultured views, pious, reverent; who finds it impossible to break the fetters of a purely mental life and to leap forth to the awful task imposed upon him; who goes dallying on until his nervelessness makes him a murderer; who, delighted at the success of

a play and at his ingenuity in thinking of it as a means of sounding the King's conscience, feigns to be mad and plays the madman to the life; who becomes a pure fatalist, the last stage of mental indifference, and, in the very face of death, full of quips, reverts to his happy youth in the few tender words, "Alas! poor Yorick!" words which drew from a sympathetic heart a great English book—Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*; who, by his want of resolution, brings upon himself and others an end of blood, then light begins to dawn, though perfect day is not yet.

Let us consider the earnestness of the Merchant of Venice for a few moments. A double purpose runs throughout the play. We have the highest lesson of life, considered as human only, treated during the first three Acts and summed up by the introduction of the caskets: the golden casket, chosen by the Prince of Morocco, the type of eastern pomp, delighting in the outward adornment of barbaric pearl and gold; the silver, by the Prince of Arragon, a Spaniard typifying the pride of self-love, a shadow enamoured of a shadow, and finding only a "blinking idiot," himself, when the treasure-box is opened; the leaden, by Bassanio, with motto of threat rather than of promise, "who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath"—in other words, must use all his talents for the best, and, not thinking of reward or glory or praise, must go whithersoever duty calls, as the man who is earthly perfect ever does. From this episode of the caskets to the end of the drama the second and higher purpose becomes more and more prominent, but how many discern it? How many think of the Jew as the personification of the Old Testament teaching, when, true to the traditions of his race, he demands justice?—of Portia as setting forth the doctrine of the New Testament when she answers justice by the heavenly plea for mercy? How many see that the enmity of Jew and Gentile representing any two antagonisms, is wrought out into peace in the love of Lorenzo and Jessica? that Lorenzo expresses the highest concord of the Universe, of things earthly with things celestial, when he points to the stars, and tells Jessica that the harmony of the spheres—the Pythagoreans supposed that the distances between the heavenly bodies corresponded to the intervals of the

musical scale, and that the orbs moving with different velocities gave out deep awe-inspiring music, heard only by the angels—was infinitely grander than its faint copy, earthly harmony, to be lost in it when this “muddy vesture of decay” was thrown off? How many note the fitness of the introduction of music just after this scene, to represent our best expression, feeble though it be, of the harmony to which we all ought to aspire? How many understand that the man that hath no music in his soul is not one who cannot sing or play or enjoy the sounds of instruments, but that he is a being without any appreciation of that eternal fitness of things of which I have just spoken: that the love of man for his fellows is like a “little candle,” eternal love like the moon in the heavens which dims the lesser light, and absorbs it just as “the main of waters” does “an inland brook”? How many divine that the episode of the rings would have us learn to acknowledge the spirit in preference to the letter? Those who do, but they are not all, catch the cheerful spirit with which the play ends, and lay to heart a great lesson so beautifully taught.*

In considering *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the points I shall bring before your notice will fall under one or other of these heads: 1. Skill in the management of dramatic material. 2. Consistency in portrayal of character—in brief, characterization.

In the books of the Stationers' Company, under the date October 8th, 1600, we find a notice of a book printed by “Tho. Fysher.” Thomas Fisher's title page commenced as follows: “A Midsommer nights dreame. As it hath been sundry

**Por.*—That light we see is burning in my hall.
How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

Ner.—When the moon shone we did not see the candle.

Por.—So doth the greater glory dim the less.
A substitute shines brightly as a king
Until a king be by, and then his state
Empties itself, as doth an inland brook
Into the main of waters. Music! hark!—[Act 5, Sc. 1.]

times publickely acted, by the Right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his servants. Written by William Shakespeare." It is probable that the only comedies of Shakespeare preceding this are *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is, therefore, one of the earliest of Shakespeare's plays, and it is the first in which the mind of the dramatist seems conscious of its powers. The title at once suggests that we have something rare before us, but, curiously enough, the commentators are at variance concerning its meaning. Their quibbling, however, seems a little forced when we make the drama itself an interpreter. The light of the play reveals the aptness and significance of the name very clearly. The poet is the dreamer. His mind gives itself up entirely to a waking reverie or a sleeping dream, choose which you will. It is unfettered by any reality of the outside world. No physical sensation checks its flow of thought, and, as in a dream, the event of years are compressed into a few minutes, and types from the great circle of humanity, from kings down to base mechanicals, "That work for bread upon Athenian stalls," pass before the mental eye of the sleeper. So much for the Dream. But why *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? The wood of the Second, Third and Fourth Acts is the central framework of the machinery of the drama, and the occurrences which take place in that wood preclude a possibility of their happening at any other season of the year than summer. The actors are to sleep on the ground, and the beauty of a summer night is to call forth the fays, without whom the play would stand still, to meet "in grove or green, By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen." Not because Midsummer eve was a traditional time for the fancy to run riot, or because certain people, like Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, were sometimes afflicted with "very midsummer madness," was the title *A Midsummer Night's Dream* chosen. It is more elastic than to imply the eve before Midsummer day, and we ought not to be surprised when we find that the action of the comedy takes place within the three days preceding the midnight of Mayday.

As I have already hinted, the centrepiece of the mechanism of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a wood—*A wood near Athens*. (Act 2, Sc. 1.) That wood is the world. The poet's metaphor is a very old one, and the reader not only of English but also of other literature soon gets familiar with it. At the commencement of the *Inferno*, Dante, midway upon the journey of our life, full of slumber, enters a forest dark. His forest in its widest meaning signified the world, in a narrower the poet's distracted fatherland. Again and again do the old English poets, Chaucer among them, lose their way on a May morning and find themselves in woods—their worlds—where they lie down to dream. The great courtly allegory of English literature, the *Faerie Queene* of Spenser, opens with Una and the Red Cross Knight wandering in the "shadie grove" whose diversity of trees shows the metaphor, for no mortal eye ever beheld the pine, the cedar, the myrtle growing in such proximity. There Spenser's two adventurers were destined to meet with such mischances as the hero who bears the symbol of the Christian—the Red Cross—must expect to encounter on earth. So in Shakespeare. The words near Athens are simply "A local habitation and a name," and we shall soon discover that these need qualification before the designs of the play are made manifest. Let me further substantiate my previous statement by appeal to the *Dream* itself. I find, firstly, that all the incidents where the tide waves of action run high and fast happen in this wood, and, secondly, that every character in the play is brought therein if Philostrate be supposed to follow in the train of Egeus, as naturally he ought to do.

I have already alluded to the far-reaching and far-wandering mental eye of the poet as exemplified by the range of the characters found in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. That eye, "in a fine frenzy rolling," did glance "from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven" as Theseus has it. We see on the stage the fays, beings from the unseen universe, unseen except by the dreamer, and, moreover, invisible to those who are brought under their influence, and mortals of our earth who find themselves strangely acted upon, they know not how. Observe the careful

parallelism maintained between the representatives of either universe. Oberon and Titania are the monarchs of the fairies. Earthly empire is set forth in the persons of Theseus, Duke of Athens—Shakespeare loves a Duke—and his wife Hippolyta. Next come a band of the folk of everyday life, Egeus, Lysander, Demetrius, Philostrate, Hermia, Helena. We have, lastly, the world of servitors—a Fairy, Puck, Pease-blossom, Cobweb, Moth, Mustard-seed, to do the behests of fairy royalty, and Bottom, Quince, Flute, Snug, Snout, Starveling, the toilers of the world, who pay court to Theseus. The order in which they enter into the wood is significant. The instruments by which the mechanism of the play is set in motion appear first, the fairies. After them the mortals who are affected by the deeds of the fairies. Then, the regal Theseus, through whom Shakespeare, with true dramatic art, performs the last act which restores harmony where discord reigned supreme.

Let us recur to the stage direction of Act. 2., Sc. 1. *A wood near Athens: Enter, from opposite sides, a Fairy, and Puck.* Puck differs so much from all the other elves, and he is so important a personage here and hereafter, that he deserves a few words of comment. The name Puck signifies an evil demon, and its source is no doubt the Icelandic puki. In old English we find the form pouke, which still lives in the dialectic pixy. But the pixies of Devonshire—and they seem to be confined to that county—are much like fairies in general. We find several classes of them, and well we may, for they haunt every grot and glen of the Western moor. Some lead wanderers astray to perish in morasses. Others visit houses, and the inmates are surprised to find their traces in the shape of good gifts. Then, again, we have evil sprites who change sleeping babes, and whom a "holy crust of bread," as Robert Herrick says in his *Hesperides*, can charm away. Shakespeare's Puck is *not* one of these. He is a shaggy muscular being, called by the people Robin Goodfellow, in the hope that a fair-sounding name may avert his wrath. He is delighted when things fall out preposterously; he is, in short, the very incarnation of the Manichæan Ahriman. He is called the lob of

spirits in the Dream, lob denoting heaviness, either mental or physical, probably the latter. Milton speaks of him as the lubbar fiend—lubbar is a stronger form of lob, and expresses a similar meaning—basking his hairy strength at the fire. He is quite unlike Prospero's servant Ariel. Ariel makes no mistakes, and ever begs the reward of his faithfulness—liberty.

Now let us learn what happens in the dramatist's world. The fairy, whose mistress is Titania, enters the wood to prepare a place where the Queen and her elves may revel. The appreciative reader cannot fail to notice how exquisite is the fay's language and how musical her verse. Shakespeare puts the most gossamer-like poetry into the mouths of the tiny creatures, to whom cowslips are tall and bats enemies of dread. In all his dramas he unfolds the nature of his characters even by the form in which they speak. It is well for us to remember this, for most of our modern Shakespearian scholarship is busied with discussions on line endings weak and light, on pause-tests and speech-ending tests, and the percentages of these. I should be the last to underrate the laudable attempts to settle the chronology of Shakespeare's plays—a most desirable end—by investigations such as I have mentioned, especially as the workers have arrived at very definite results; but, unless we strive to keep well before us the spirit of the writer we may find ourselves intent on a microscopical examination of some detail without the power to estimate the relation of that detail to the whole work. Above all, we may be led to consider as infallible the canon that the dates of Shakespeare's writings may be determined by comparing the ratios of rhyme to blank verse in each, blank verse preponderating more and more as we approach *The Winter's Tale*, said to be the last play written entirely by Shakespeare, and to have been produced in 1611. Puck, in his turn speaking to the diminutive creature, warns the fairy not to let the Queen come within Oberon's sight. Oberon is "passing fell and wrath" because Titania will not give to him a little "changeling" boy to be his henchman. The fairy monarchs are suffering as are all the chief human actors in the play, Theseus and his bride-elect excepted, from jealousy in love.

Oberon and Titania, like the gods of the Classic world, know envy and hate and strife. In spite of Puck's request they meet. Their dialogue shows Titania's womanly nature. She begs Oberon to cease dissension because from dissension humanity suffers. This is noteworthy, for the fairies have been accused as "beings without delicate feeling and without morality"—"careless and unscrupulous"—reckless of the ills incident to mortals. Titania is unyielding, and Oberon will not forego the coveted possession. The King prepares a charm by way of revenge, and his speech to Puck, shadowing forth his intentions, is undoubtedly deeply allegorical. Shakespeare, with true dramatic art, takes from the history of his own country events quite consonant with the spirit of the Dream. We are apt to forget the momentous crisis of our national life through which Shakespeare passed. We are apt to forget that Shakespeare was but a youth when Sir Philip Sidney, a "spirit without spot," the pink of Elizabethan chivalry, the flower of English knighthood, died, fighting for the cause of civil and religious liberty of which Holland equally with England was the battle-ground; that only two years later a small but hardy and gallant band of seamen, sea-dogs as they were wont to call themselves, beat off the Spaniard from our Southern shores and saved their country, while England's Queen was read ' to lead her troops to the fight, if need were. We are apt to forget these things, but their remembrance must have been vivid enough in the minds of the spectators of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Englishmen of Shakespeare's day, one and all, looked kindly on Elizabeth's faults and were proud of her virtues. Thus, by weaving history into his play, the dramatist could at once pay compliment to the reigning sovereign and find aptest material for a higher purpose. Oberon is made to say:—

Oberon.—My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememberest
 Since once I sat upon a promontory,
 And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,
 Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
 That the rude sea grew civil at her song;
 And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
 To hear the sea-maid's music.

Puck.—I remember.

Oberon.—That very time I saw, (but thou could'st not,)

Flying between the cold moon and the earth,

Cupid all arm'd; a certain * aim he took

At a fair vestal, throned by the west;

And loosed his love shaft smartly from his bow,

As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:

But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft

Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon;

And the imperial votaress passed on,

In maiden meditation, fancy free.

Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell:

It fell upon a little western flower,

Before, milk-white, now purple with love's wound,

And maidens call it love-in-idleness.

Fetch me that flower.

The central figure of the historical group is the Virgin Queen proof against Cupid's "fiery shaft." The readers of Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* will recollect that, after Master Walter Raleigh had recited these beautiful lines to Elizabeth, lines which Leicester told her Philip Sidney had ever in his mouth, she, half-unconsciously, murmured over those verses of which she was the subject, and paused at the words,

"In maiden meditation, fancy free."

The other references are not so clear, but we may be sure they were significant. The "mermaid, on a dolphin's back" may refer to the centre-piece of the Earl of Leicester's pageants exhibited before Elizabeth at Kenilworth in 1575. "Cupid all armed" may be the Earl himself. Sir Walter Scott in the novel just mentioned, citing Robert Laneham as his authority, describes the scene at the castle. "A raft, so disposed as to resemble a "small floating island, illuminated by a great variety of torches, "and surrounded by floating pageants formed to represent sea-horses, on which sat Tritons, Nereids, and other fabulous deities "of the seas and rivers, made its appearance upon the lake, and, "issuing from behind a small heronry where it had been concealed, floated gently towards the farther end of the bridge," on

* i.e. Sure.

which the Queen had stepped. "On the islet appeared a beautiful woman," attended by two nymphs. The clerk of the Council Chamber door testified that "Such was the blaze of burning darts, the gleams of stars coruscant, the streams and hail of fiery sparks, lightnings of wild-fire, and flight-shot of thunder-bolts, with continuance, terror and vehemency, that the heavens thundered, the waters surged and the earth shook." But, if the interpretation of the little western flower be true, it is more significant still. By it has been understood Lettice, Countess of Essex, who, for love of false Leicester, poisoned her husband as he was returning from Ireland in 1576. More than this, it had a double reference to Shakespeare himself, in that one of his kinsmen on his mother's side, Edward Arden, who had some share in the poisoning, was executed in 1583, and in that a son of Lettice, the Earl of Essex, Elizabeth's favourite, was the dramatist's patron. The allegory may not have been read aright—and there are other readings—but that Shakespeare made the high in rank and the great in influence of his time serve his own purpose here is incontestable.

The "western flower" whose stage embodiment was, perhaps, a pansy Puck was commanded to fetch. That flower, emblem of mischief and trouble, typical of crime ensuing from listlessness, is to be a magician's wand in the hand of the dramatist. Its juice is to be squeezed on Titania's eyelids as she sleeps, and it is to produce this marvellous effect—she is to love what first meets her eye on awaking. Here, then, we have dreams within a dream. The actors are acted on when their senses are locked up in the fetters of slumber, and events, which in the ordinary world of waking-life it might take years to accomplish, are completed in a few minutes.

That I may carry on my review of the play connectedly, and it is scarce possible to avoid the form of commentary, I must refer to the First Act, which is simply a prologue to all that follows. Lysander and Hermia, whose friends will not consent to their union, have determined to go out into the world—the poet's wood—and to fight out the battle of life for themselves. Demetrius finds himself drawn thither by love of Hermia also.

Helena, despised by Demetrius, but loving him devotedly, follows, the fourth of the little band. Thus is there a state of strife among the ordinary folk similar to that of Titania and Oberon. The emotions of these men and women are wrought up to the highest pitch. Their intense mental strain finds an outlet in quick and violent physical action. Mark the running, the breathless haste, the impassioned cries in which this play abounds. Rapidity is the key by which to unlock the inner meaning of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. Oberon happens to see Demetrius and Helena as they rush up and down the stage,—the one pursued, the other pursuing,—and hears them utter their words in convulsive spasms. He is invisible, he says, and he will overhear their conference.

Now, why does Oberon speak these words? Why does he seem to assure himself of his invisibility since he must have known long before that as a spirit he was beyond the ken of mortal sight? To those who are acquainted with the mechanism of the old theatre or the history of the English stage, and who read with a will, the line is plain enough. It is spoken to the spectators in the body of the theatre to aid their comprehension. Their intellectual culture was not so refined as to allow their imagination to abstract the fairy king into spiritual essence when his bodily presence was a hindrance to the clear understanding of the incidents portrayed on the stage. These hidden passages, which are framed for the audience and artistically woven into the body of a speech, occur frequently in Shakespeare. In the First Scene of the First Act of *Julius Cæsar* the tribune Flavius says of the citizens :—

“ See, whether their basest metal be not moved ;
They vanish tongue-tied in their guiltiness.”

Likely enough those who played the citizens might act indifferently, but in any case the theatre-goers were to know that making holiday to see Cæsar come home in triumph was wrong, however much the faces of the carpenter, the cobbler, and the others failed to express guilt.

Puck returns with the flower, and Oberon, sympathising with Helena, tells Puck to work a spell on Demetrius that he

may refuse Helena no longer. The King himself then goes to streak Titania's eyes in revenge. The play-plot thickens. Lysander and Hermia roam on and on till they faint with wandering in the wood, and, exhausted, sink down to sleep. But Puck makes a mistake. He sees Lysander, charms him, and when Lysander awakes he beholds Helena running after Demetrius. The charm has been potent. He vows he loves Helena and hates Hermia,—the one is a "dove" and the other a "raven." Then Hermia awakes and finds herself alone. She rushes away to seek Lysander, who is paying court to Helena. Demetrius awakes and likewise pays court to Helena, the first lady he sees. Hermia in amazement comes on the stage, and we have confusion worse confounded.

The tide of passion now reaches its height. Shakespeare's emotional ground tone, with its secondary harmonics of lesser griefs and joys, often blended with subtle complexity, swells out into its diapason generally in the centre of his plays. It is in the Third Act that King Lear, in a perfect whirlwind of passion, ejaculates his awful curse, beginning with these words :—

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks ! rage ! blow !
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
 Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks !

In Henry VIII, Queen Katharine and Wolsey are in especial the characters taken to unfold the dramatist's lesson, and that lesson is, doubtless, as Prof. Henry Morley suggests, the truth uttered by the Psalmist : "Surely every man walketh in a vain shew : surely they are disquieted in vain : he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." A secondary purpose, "the glorification of the house of Tudor by an historical abstraction of the main merit and value of the rule of this house,"—and this is what Prof. Gervinus is inclined to consider the "essential idea" of Henry VIII, although he confesses that he fails to find that dramatic unity, so striking elsewhere,—exists also. And where does the crisis in the life of Queen and of Statesman happen ? In the Third Act. It is in the very heart of the tragedy that Banquo's death occurs and Macbeth's fortunes

begin to wane. "Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul! But I do love thee!" says Othello, (Act 3, Scene 3) when his cup of happiness is filled to the brim. So in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Listen to the storm of epithets, spoken now by one, now by another, of the agitated group: "Juggler, canker-blossom, thief, painted may-pole," from Hermia's lips; "Counterfeit, puppet," from Helena's; "Cat, burr, Ethiop, dwarf, minimus, bead, acorn, loathed medicine, tawny Tartar, hated potion," from Lysander's. They cannot contain themselves, these four mortals. The men try to fight a duel. They are deluded by Puck, who has been told by Oberon to repair the mischief he has done. Vainly they dash hither and thither in the wood, our world diminished. Helena runs from Hermia, Hermia wearily plods her way back towards Athens. The end of all this strife is at hand. Those whose blood is hot in quarrel wander distractedly till nature is weary, and then each lies down to rest. Henceforth among them peace reigns.

There is yet a second band of mortals to enter the wood but to do justice to them is difficult. How can we portray the rude, rough men, the homespun of humanity, whom Shakespeare always draws so lovingly? His mechanics and his clowns, one and all, have an undoubted earnestness of speech that assures us the writer's affection welled up from its depths as he penned their sayings. These humble people were enshrined in his heart's core. Their wit is the wittiest, their drollery the most droll, their mistakes the most grotesque. Open Shakespeare anywhere and you cannot help feeling this. Look at weeping Launce as he stands and apostrophizes his dog in words that, coming from him, are inimitable. Look at Dogberry, the quintessence of village pomposity and singleness of idea. How Conrade's insult, expressing a contemptuous denial of the importance of the grand functionary, clings to the constable! He turns round to all the "dissembly," and boiling over with wounded pride and rage says, "O that he were here to *write* me down an ass!" A minion of the law, he wished to have documentary evidence in black

and white. His oft repeated request to the group by which he is surrounded, "Remember that I am an ass," is the sustained echo of his thoughts. Reflect on the sayings of "sententious" Touchstone; mark the air of intellectual importance with which he enumerates the seven degrees of the lie; own that "he's as good at anything and yet a fool," and that, as his name implies, his fool's bolt often hits the mark the wise fail to reach. The same love and care is seen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The little band of Athenian mechanicals have gone into the wood to rehearse a play to honour 'Theseus' wedding, and we shall see presently how the story of that play is completely in harmony with the main thought of the *Dream*. Athenian mechanicals did I call them? They are not Athenians for a moment; they are true Saxons. Read their names: *Bottom*, *Quince*, *Flute*, *Snout*, *Snug*, *Starveling*; their trades, weaver, carpenter, bellows-mender, tinker, joiner, tailor. I can imagine Shakespeare, bright-eyed and quick-witted, oft strolling into a Stratford inn, sitting in a nook of its rush-bestrown parlor, and intently studying the words and actions of the hard-handed men of Warwickshire as they made merry over their ale. Here they are on the stage, and what a perfect picture! We have a planet—*Bottom* the weaver, *Bully Bottom* as they jovially and endearingly call him—and five satellites. The lesser orbs feel that they are nothing without the central luminary. When his mental sun has for the nonce disappeared, the carpenter utters his verdict, "You have not a man in all Athens able to discharge *Pyramus* but he;" the bellows-mender his, "O sweet *Bully Bottom*. Thus hath he lost sixpence a day during his life; he could not have 'scaped sixpence a day: an the Duke had not given him sixpence a day for playing *Pyramus*, I'll be hanged; he would have deserved it: sixpence a day in *Pyramus*, or nothing." These are their estimates of the weaver's character, but they are not Shakespeare's. The name *Bottom* implies this; *Bottom*, the shallow man, the man whose depth is easily seen by all who have discernment. Shakespeare's names are not meaningless. They not only denote persons, but they also tell us somewhat of the qualities those

persons possess. This enables us to understand the purport of a play far better and with much more ease than if those names had been given at hap-hazard. Let me cite a few chosen at random : Beatrice is she who makes happy ; Benedict is the blessed one ; Speed, in irony, means the man of delay ; Proteus, the changeable ; Caliban, perhaps the word Cannibal transposed ; Miranda, one meet to be admired : " Admired Miranda ! Indeed the top of admiration," as Ferdinand aptly says (Temp. Act 3, Scene 1). The burly weaver of our play is graphically described by Puck, a being gifted with penetration beyond that of ordinary mortals, as " The *shallowest* thickskin of that *barren* sort"— " sort" bearing its usual Shakesperian meaning, company. Bottom, naturally enough, is full of the pride which proceeds from ignorance, pride which a large physical frame tends to increase. In his own estimation there is nothing he cannot do. He will play any and every part, Pyramus, Thisby, the Lion. He gets quite unmanageable. Flattery alone can soothe him, and Quince knows how to flatter. " Pyramus is a proper (*i.e.*, handsome) man, a most lovely, gentlemanlike man : therefore, you must needs play Pyramus." With a growl he consents. The next important character in this carefully drawn group is Quince. He is of far greater mental calibre than the hero of the mechanicals. He has a quick wit, and is, moreover, the practical man to whose judgment the assignment of parts and the buying of such properties as the actors need are entrusted. The sketch is true to the life. The head of a company of labourers often has a servant far more astute than his master. To me Quince is of diminutive stature, a pigmy by the side of Bottom, towering head and shoulders above all the others. But the majesty of physical strength often suspects its own weakness when put to anything like a mental test and this seems to be the reason why Quince enjoys the full sunshine of the weaver's favour. Still, the others see not these two as Shakespeare did. In their eyes the gulf between Bottom and Quince is profound and impassable, for when Bottom disappears there is no attempt to set up Quince as a substitute ; no ! the play simply cannot go forward.

I can only shadow forth the characters of the remaining aspirants to theatrical fame. The weak piping of Flute, the bellows-mender—probably his name implies a shrill voice—"Let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming," contrasts vividly with the powerful bass of him who undertakes the rôle of Pyramus. With discrimination Quince has put down Flute to act Thisby. Next comes Starveling, a poor, lean, weak creature, if names mean anything, who, whenever he speaks, expresses his opinion that something will have to be omitted, or ventures to prophesy that an untoward hitch will occur. He, like Flute, is to play a woman's part. In Snout, the tinker, more manliness of character is apparent, a kind of brusqueness which his craft might well have fostered. Snout, too, has some inventive power—if that can be called invention which never rises above the most absurd ingenuity in dealing with the things of every-day life—in the matter of prologues and moonshine, and has a man's part assigned to him. Snug, the joiner, confesses to be "slow of study," and ventures no remark when his companions are puzzling over the preliminaries of their little drama. He is the lowest in the mental scale, and fears he will fail even as a lion, but Quince shrewdly tells him he may "do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring."

When the mechanicals are rehearsing their play, the mischievous Puck interferes, and seizing a favourable opportunity places an ass's head on Bottom's shoulders. The hero of the rugged, untutored band can be judged of aright now, even by the dullest of the theatre-goers. He struts about the stage with his shaggy head-piece, the very personification of asinine humanity. He is transported, his friends say, and they flee. Then the uncouth monster wanders up and down in the wood, and, true to nature, does what almost every man would do in such case—he sings: sings to drown any fear that may arise. The song, exquisitely appropriate to the singer, tells of English birds, and it awakes Titania, essence of all that is spiritual, æsthetical, highly cultured. Mark the sequel: The antipodes of mental and physical life are attracted and the ignorant, gross, uncouth mechanical becomes the loved one of the Fairy Queen.

Well has a poet of our day sung of inharmoniousness such as this :

" Thou art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down."

All the time that Titania and the weaver are together, Shakespeare does his best to make the contrast of their natures as vivid as possible. Titania speaks in verse that is music itself ; she is answered in prose. She introduces to the " shallowest thickskin " three servants to pay him the most delicate attentions. Thus are two of them greeted. To Cobweb the transformed says, " If I cut my *finger*, I shall make bold with you ; to Mustardseed, " I promise you your kindred hath made my *eyes* water ere now." Fingers and eyes ! How the gross the physical side of human nature, comes to the front ! And those fingers and eyes have other senses to match them,—ears that delight in the tongs and the bones, taste that has " great desire to a bottle of hay," for " good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow," and to " a handful or two of dried peas." Yet, in spite of all this grossness, there is, obscure in the depths of the weaver's mind, shallow as they are, a kindly nature, which the world has rightly deemed characteristic of its giants. " Do not fret yourself too much in the action"—of killing a humble bee—" have a care the honey bag break not: I would be loath to have you overflown with a honey-bag, signior," he says to Cobweb, and elsewhere this goodness or rather absence of malice and spiteful temper is dimly visible.

There is yet another company to be brought into the wood, Theseus and Hippolyta and their followers. Theseus was a knight of Shakespeare's day, Shakespeare's ideal of chivalric nobility. Who is shadowed under the name it is difficult to say. Some are of opinion that A Midsummer Night's Dream was written on the occasion of the Earl of Southampton's marriage, in 1598 ; others think that our play formed a part of the wedding festivities of the Earl of Essex, in 1590. Theseus may have been an Earl of Southampton or an Earl of Essex—neither suggestion is entitled to much weight—but without doubt he was some noble Englishman to whom Shake-

speare intended to pay high compliment. When the dramatist disguised him as Theseus he thought of the warrior who slew the Minotaur, who conquered the Amazons, who battled with the Centaurs, who made Athens the capital of the commonwealth Attica, where, before, there had been twelve townships; of him whose bones were brought by honouring citizens from lovely Scyros to the city he founded and placed in a beautiful temple called Theseum from the name of the hero whose remains it enshrined. His language throughout the play becomes him well. He speaks as if he were every inch a king, from the beginning of the Dream, where he addresses Hermia in the cause of filial affection with all the calm dignity of a royal magistrate, to the end of the drama. His hounds are not those of ordinary men, for he proudly speaks of them as being "bred out of the Spartan kind" and "Crook-kneed and dew-lapped like Thessalian bulls." But we have seen that this oriental setting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* serves convenience and dramatic effect simply, and that the characters are English, everyone, with a faint dash of Greek simile and metaphor here and there to preserve the outer harmony of the poet's ideas. And as this play was written for Theseus, so Shakespeare has made him perform the last act for setting right the confusion and enmity into which the experience of life has brought the four lovers. We left them sleeping, and while they slept Puck rectified his former misdeed by streaking their eyes, not with Cupid's flower, as before, but with Dian's, the classic antidote. Theseus, seeing them, commands Egeus to "bid the huntsmen wake them with their horns," and straightway they are awakened only to speak in language hesitating, confused, vague, about what had just transpired. Demetrius' words of wonderment disclose the inner meaning of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when he says:—

My love to Hermia,
Melted as the snow, seems to me now
As the remembrance of an idle gaud
Which in my *childhood* I did dote upon.

Smile if you will; persuade yourselves that this comedy is only

a pretty amusement to while away some three hours, but I cannot be convinced that Shakespeare used mankind as puppets, to sleep and to wake, to be charmed and anon to be free from charm, to swear affection only to forswear it the next moment, and all this at a master's caprice. No! the stage whereon the Dream is played is the outside world of thought and of action, diminished but intensified. It is noteworthy, also, that Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, brought their troubles upon themselves. Hermia, quick-tempered, self-willed, firm in resolve, lacked filial affection; Demetrius, in his fickleness, proved inconstant to Hermia; Helena, distrustful and reproachful, forsook her bosom friend; Lysander, resolute, over-bold, candid to a fault, made light of his father-in-law's authority. They all fled into the world and they suffered.

One dreamer still sleeps, Bottom, the weaver. No horn startles him with its shrill note, but slowly and naturally he awakes. The reprimand of Quince, "Pyramus, enter; your cue is past;"—spoken before the hero of the mimic drama was transformed and found himself Titania's lord, before he was made an example of the inharmoniousness that might be, nay, often is, in life, sank deep into the mechanical's mind. He rubs his eyes, and ere he has well crossed the threshold of waking life he murmurs mechanically, "When my cue comes call me and I will answer: my next is, Most fair Pyramus." His dazed senses catch a glimmer of reason's light, and he vows he has had "a most rare vision." But dimly, very dimly, that vision dawns. Thrice he essays to describe it, thrice his untutored tongue refuses to tell what he has seen. Mark how he gasps at empty air, how he blames the poverty of his senses, confounding their functions—and his lowly companions are guilty of similar errors throughout the play—how he stammers out these words, "the *ear* of man hath not *seen*, man's *hand* is not able to *taste*, his *tongue* to *conceive* what my dream was,"—words of vivid contrast to Titania's pointed and clear explanation, "Methought I was enamoured of an ass." What will poor Bottom do? He feels that if that "most rare vision" could be embodied in writing he would be im-

mortal. At length he hits it: Peter Quince shall turn his failure into glorious success. "I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because—because—" O stuttering weaver!—"it hath no bottom!" So will it be handed down to posterity under the dreamer's name.

The last act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* consists mainly of the performance of "The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby." Shakespeare is supposed to have read the story in Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, completed in 1575 when the dramatist was eleven years old. This book was the medium by which Englishmen became familiar with the classic poem until the reign of Charles I. Just as we have in *Hamlet* a play within a play, serving highest purposes, so here the adventures of Pyramus and Thisby are worthful and in complete accord with Shakespeare's aim. The mournful tale of the Babylonian lovers was a favourite with the Elizabethans. In one of the numerous song books of the first half of Elizabeth's reign, entitled "*A Handful of Pleasant Delites*" (published 1584), now edited with characteristic care by Mr. Arber, and to be bought for a trifle, are found, "*A New Sonet of Pyramus and Thisbe*," and many references to the untimely fate of the two lovers. This collection of songs was extremely popular. We have, moreover, evidence that Shakespeare knew its contents for he seems to have been thinking of the first poem of the collection, "*A Nosegaie*," when he makes Ophelia tell the meanings of the flowers in *Hamlet* (Act 4, Scene 5). I cannot forbear quoting this stanza from "*A Sonet of Two Faithful Lovers*", (page 47):

Then let us joy in this our love:
In spite of Fortune's wrath, my deere;
Twoo willes in one, as dooth behoove,
One love in both, let still appeare:
And I will be, will be,
Piramus to thee, my owne Thisbie,
So thou againe,
My constant lover shalt remaine.

The mechanicals are to rehearse a *lesson of constancy* to their superiors, lately inconstant. The essence of the little tragedy can be told in few words. Thisbe is a Babylonian, loved by Pyramus, and the pair manage to carry on conversations through the wall which separates the adjoining houses of their parents. One day they agree to meet at the tomb of Ninus. Thisbe keeps her appointment, but when waiting for Pyramus she espies a lioness and flees. In running away she loses her mantle, which the lioness soils with blood. Pyramus comes, beholds the gore-stained garment, thinks Thisbe has killed herself, and then commits suicide. Thisbe, returning from flight, sees the dead body of Pyramus, and stabs herself. Incidents like these mean great acting, and, let the audience look to their eyes, for Bottom intends to "move storms" and to "condole in some measure."

There are several points worthy of notice regarding this subordinate play. First, the mechanicals give the spectators credit for but little imagination; they have none, and cannot realize that other people possess faculties which they do not. They bring on to the stage a wall that is "sensible," in other words, alive; they personify Moonshine, and this, too, in an age when the fancy of the audience was, in many respects, largely drawn upon. The old stage had no scenery worth mentioning. The first English plays were acted in the inn-yard. Around the four sides which formed the yard's enclosure ran a gallery, generally on the level of the first story. The stage was erected at one end of the yard, and was curtained off from the rest of the space. The enclosed part of the gallery served for window, rampart, tower or castle. The sight of the stage was shut off from the groundlings of the pit, filling the inn-yard below, by a curtain, analogous to the drop-scene of to-day. At the back of the stage was a representation of some place likely to be of service on various occasions; for example, a pastoral landscape or a room. There was no permanent furniture; a bed or a table and a chair might be introduced when necessary. Sometimes, when neighbouring galleries and windows were conveniently situated, a god was let down from above, but this was all. Sir Philip Sidney, in his work *An Apologie for*

Poetry, published in 1595, about the time when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written, speaking of the English theatre, says: "You shall have Asia of the one side and Affrick of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player when he cometh in, must even begin with telling where he is: or else, the tale will not be believed. Now ye shall have three ladies, walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by, we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame, if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that, comes out a hideous monster, with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders, are bound to take it for a cave. While in the meantime, two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?" The gorgeous pageantry of our day existed then only in the mind's eye. What entertainment there was lay in the acting and the costly dresses of the actors, and these made great amends for sorry scenery, when we remember that the playwright himself trained the players. We speak proudly of our Keans and our Kembles, but we may reasonably doubt if they surpassed the older Burbages and Alleyns, tutored by Shakespeare. Our eyes, blinded by time and prejudice, fail to see many nice distinctions of character which may well have been clearly portrayed under the tuition of him who conceived them.

Again, the language undergoes extraordinary treatment in the mouths of the mechanicals. Quince speaks the prologue automatically "like a rough colt." He misplaces the stops, says precisely what he does not mean, and amuses the audience as much as Ralph Roister Doister's letter did Christian Custance. Quince was nervous, doubtless, but there is method in his nervousness. It is easy also to see intellectual poverty throughout the sayings of the hard-handed men of Athens. When the prologue has unfolded the rôles of the actors and told the thread of the story, Pyramus sidles up to the wall. He apostrophises it in eleven lines, containing as many interjectional O's, sure signs of uncultured feeling, yet honest withal. Thisbe's emotion on seeing the dead body of her lover exhausts itself in excited

doggrel over "lily brows" and "cherry nose" and "cowslip cheeks." She cannot rise above the lament of corporal beauty—such beauty, too. Truly, the poetry is as primitive as the poets, but much of it is playful satire against the excessive alliteration of contemporaneous plays. Witness these lines among many:—

"For, by thy gracious, golden, glittering, gleams,"

"That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with cheer."

The careful reader will observe that the acting is as inartistic as the language is primitive. Pyramus, whose mental equilibrium has been for ever unsettled by that unfortunate reprimand of Quince in the wood concerning the cue, with indescribable scorn crushes the critic Theseus when he presumes to suggest that "the wall, being sensible, should curse again." "No," says the man of few ideas, "no, in truth, sir, he should not." "Deceiving me"—the "deceiving me" of a previous line—"is Thisby's cue." "I am proof against censure this time, most noble Theseus" Bottom thought. "I know my cues now, and I have given Thisby hers, and my acting is above reproach, so be silent." Another oddity of our hero is to kill himself twice, and between the stabs to turn to the moon, standing near, and ejaculate "Moon, take thy flight!" Yet another is to vanquish the incorrigible Duke and the rash Demetrius, thus:—

The. Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

Dem. Ay, and Wall too.

Bot. [*starting up*] No, I assure you; the wall is down that parted their fathers. Will it please you to see the epilogue?

We can picture the handicraftsman lying on the stage, self-slain, with helmet and sword laid carefully by his side. We can picture him as he starts up to prove how baseless is the criticism of the on-lookers. We can picture him slowly adjusting his cumbrous paraphernalia and shuffling off to join his admiring fellows. But we must not merely laugh at him. Like his companions, who are as entertaining and instructive as he is, he has done his best to act with purpose.

The tragedy of the mechanicals is then made the means of

bringing home the essence of the inner thought, taught by the larger drama, of which it forms a part. Theseus, a courtly poet "of imagination all compact," found matter for reflection in the inartistic, unpoetical attempts of the base-born. To Hippolyta, complaining of the worthlessness of the scenes she is witnessing, he says, "*The best in this kind are but shadows ; and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.*" The noble Theseus discerns one lesson—honesty of act, but his plummet has not sounded the depth of Shakespeare's poetry. Some of the wedding party had passed through vicissitudes, bitter and painful, vicissitudes which might have been as fateful as the loves of Pyramus and Thisbe ; and, as the misery in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is due mainly to inconstancy, so the episode at Ninus' tomb is to be an example of affection stronger even than death. In the greatness of his generosity, Theseus tells his friends to pardon the uncouth way in which the labouring Athenians teach the moral.

The end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is highly artistic. Oberon and Titania have given rise to the strange adventures in the comedy. They are no longer at strife, but together they enter the Duke's palace at dream-time. With song and dance they pronounce a blessing on those who have just left the stage, destined to appear again under other names and as Lears, Macbeths and Hamlets, to speak for all time. To the master hand that drew them they were but a little part of the humanity among whom he lived, and whom he loved so well.

To summarize the main points to which your attention has been directed : It has been stated that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is allegorical ; that its wood is the world ; that its *dramatis personæ* are Athenians in fiction, Englishmen in fact ; that some members of all groups save the earthly-imperial are similarly affected ; that the hero of earthly empire performs, as in a Masque, the last, though comparatively unimportant, act which restores harmony ; that the dream is simply the experience of years narrowed to a span by the active mind of the dreamer, and intensified ; finally, that the tragedy of Pyramus

and Thisbe is the diapason which swells out and completes the whole.

I can fancy the critic opening his Shakespeare and quoting these lines of Puck in refutation :

Think That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream.

But Prospero, perhaps Shakespeare's very self, shall reply :—

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

And, more than all, Hippolyta shall speak decisively for me :—

*The story * * * **
More witnesseth than fancy's images,
And grows to something of great constancy,
But, howsoever, strange and admirable.

A word to the students, and I have done : Gentlemen, it is a privilege and a pleasure to have one's daily life brought into contact with those who feel the worth of the earnestness I have been speaking. But often, when I am addressing you in the class-room, the pithy remark of Sir William Hamilton to his Edinburgh class comes into my mind. He told them he could not teach them philosophy, but only to philosophize. Change the words and the saying is eminently true of English. I cannot teach you our literature, but only to be literary. Not by reading one book or any number of books, or by cramming into feverish, over-wrought brains rows of names and dates for examinational purposes can you gain a knowledge of literature. Your aim should be to *feel* that power which De Quincey, in a happy moment, declared to be the characteristic of all worthful writing. "Powerless" writing abounds ; it comprehends railway time-tables, guides, treatises on dress, and the thousand and one books whose brightest side is their outside. But that "power," that faculty of creating new and unusual emotions free from morbidity, is God-sent, and is a

rare thing upon the earth. And, being God-sent, it is God-like, not of or for a day. I can quite understand the flush of pride which the man who laid the last stone of the Parthenon or the Coliseum must have felt as he stepped back and surveyed the fabric. The glory of the Parthenon and the Coliseum has fled, but Homer and Virgil live yet. Do not think a daring prophet him who asserts that, when Macaulay's New Zealander shall gaze complacently on the mouldering ruins of our great modern engineering triumphs, the influence of English literature will be felt somewhere in the world. Mind will outlive mortal, and it is the transcendent mind that produces writing of literary power. You may not be endowed with this precious jewel, but use the treasures of others, remembering that literature's practical side is to make you earnest. To vivify the soul, there is nothing more potent than literature ; of all literatures than English. And the teacher employing the materials of others should be like the poet of whom it is said, "He doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will intice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth as if your journey should lie through a fair Vineyard, at the first give you a cluster of Grapes : that full of that taste, you may long to pass further. He cometh to you with words sent in delightful proportion, and with a tale, forsooth, he cometh unto you : with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner. *And pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue.*"

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